

REMARKS

Applicant submits this Amendment in reply to the Office Action dated November 21, 2003. As an initial matter, Applicant gratefully acknowledges the Examiner's indication of the allowance of claim 38-41 and the allowability of the subject matter of claims 10-20 and 22-36.

Applicant has rewritten independent claim 1 to include the allowable subject matter of claim 10, and rewritten each of claims 27 and 32 into independent form to include the subject matter of the base claim and any intervening claims. It should be understood, however, that by rewriting claim 1 to include the subject matter of claim 10 and rewriting each of claim 27 and 32 into independent form to include the subject matter of the base claim and any intervening claims, Applicant is not acquiescing to the fact that the subject matter of independent claim 1 or dependent claim 3 is unpatentable over the cited references. Nevertheless, in the interests of expediting the prosecution of this application, Applicant has rewritten independent claim 1 to include the subject matter of claim 10 and rewritten each of claims 27 and 32 into independent form to include the subject matter of the base claim and any intervening claims. Accordingly, Applicant asserts that each of independent claims 1, 27, and 32, and their respective dependent claims, are now in condition for allowance.

In this Amendment, Applicant has amended the specification, amended Fig. 5, cancelled claims 3 and 10, without prejudice or disclaimer, amended claims 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 9, 11, 12, 14, 15, 17, 18, 24, 26, 27, and 32, and added new claims 43-51 to more clearly define the claimed invention. Claims 1, 27, 32, 38, 39, 40, 41, 43, and 51 are the sole independent claims.

Before entry of this Amendment, claims 1-42 were pending in this application. After entry of this Amendment, claims 1-2, 4-9, and 11-51 are pending in this application.

The originally-filed specification, claims, abstract, and drawings fully support the subject matter of amended claims 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 9, 11, 12, 14, 15, 17, 18, 24, 26, 27, and 32, and new claims 43-51. No new matter was introduced.

On page 2 of the Office Action, the Examiner objected to the specification. Applicant has corrected the specification to obviate the objections set forth by the Examiner. Accordingly, Applicant respectfully requests withdrawal of the objection to the specification.

On page 3 of the Office Action, the Examiner objected to the drawings, specifically Fig. 5. Applicant has corrected Fig. 5 and the corresponding portions of the specification as set forth above. Accordingly, Applicant respectfully requests withdrawal of the objection to the drawings.

On page 4 of the Office Action, the Examiner indicated that the listing of references in the specification was not a proper information disclosure statement. As the Examiner has indicated on the Form PTO-892 provided with the Office Action, however, that two of the three references listed in the specification, Japanese Published Patent Application 08-94907 and 6-313831, have already been considered, Applicant submits an Information Disclosure Statement herewith listing only the third reference, Japanese Published Patent Application 9-218336.

On page 4 of the Office Action, the Examiner objected to claims 3, 6, and 10. Applicant has changed claim 6 as suggested by the Examiner. With regards to claims 3

and 10, although those claims have been cancelled, without prejudice or disclaimer, Applicant has incorporated the changes suggested by the Examiner into as-amended independent claim 1. Accordingly, Applicant respectfully requests withdrawal of the objection to the claims.

Applicant requests the entry of this Amendment, the Examiner's reconsideration and reexamination of the application, and the timely allowance of the pending claims.

The Office Action contains characterizations of the claims and the related art with which Applicant does not necessarily agree. Unless expressly noted otherwise, Applicant declines to subscribe to any statement or characterization in the Office Action.


In discussing the specification, claims, abstract, and drawings in this Amendment, it is to be understood that Applicant is in no way intending to limit the scope of the claims to any exemplary embodiments described in the specification or abstract and/or shown in the drawings. Rather, Applicant is entitled to have the claims interpreted broadly, to the maximum extent permitted by statute, regulation, and applicable case law.

Please grant any extensions of time required to enter this response and charge any additional required fees to our Deposit Account No. 06-0916.

Respectfully submitted,

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GARRETT & DUNNER, L.L.P.

Dated: March 18, 2004

By: 
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Attachment: One (1) Replacement Sheet including Fig. 5;
One (1) Annotated Sheet Showing Changes.